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The Alma Record \$1.00

SMOKE BELLEW

By
JACK LONDON

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SYNOPSIS.

Christopher Bellew, a tenderfoot, starts for the Klondike in a gold rush and picks up work at the back breaking toll of packing freight.

He meets a beautiful girl, Joy Gastell, asserts his own party, and he and Shorty, a new acquaintance, hire out to two wealthy prospectors. Joy has nicknamed him "Smoke."

Smoke and Shorty befriended a man named Brock and nearly perished in attempting to cross Lake LeBarge because of the meanness of their employers.

Smoke and Shorty take command by force and get through to Dawson City, where they are discharged. On Brock's tip they stampede for Squaw Creek.

They overtake Joy Gastell and her father. To help the sea lion crowd Joy treacherously leads them away from Squaw Creek.

Smoke saves the girl's feet from freezing. He and Shorty by mistake jump a miner's claim and lose it. Then Smoke leads Surprise lake, the bottom of which is covered with gold.

Smoke is shot at, witnesses the murder of a miner by the unknown marksmen, and is arrested for murder himself.

Smoke goes to Surprise lake. He falls into a crevasse in a glacier, and a miner, Carson, makes heroic efforts to rescue him.

Smoke cuts a rope to save Carson, falls himself and is caught in a pocket below, from which he is rescued by Carson and Joy.

Smoke and Shorty find a tribe of starving Indians, and Smoke goes to Mucio to secure food and help.

Smoke forces Cultus George, an Indian, to assist by stringing him up with a rope. Smoke and Shorty find several dead men in the snow.

They discover Laura Stibley's party, a den of scoundrels and start heroic survival measures. One man, Wentworth, is mysteriously free from the trouble.

They discover Wentworth's secret hoard of potatoes and save many lives. Lucille Arral wants Smoke to corner the egg market and discipline her lover, Will Water.

Will Water wants eggs for Miss Arral. He agrees to pay \$10 per egg if two dozen sold him with her smile.

By a clever ruse Will Water unloads bad eggs on Smoke and Shorty and they lose \$17,000. They are captured by Indians.

Smoke, a Scotchman, is their chief. No white man is permitted to escape. Labiskwee, daughter of Smoke, admires Smoke.

Smoke, Shorty and Dan McCan, another prisoner, plan to escape and Shorty gets away. Labiskwee loves Smoke and wants to go with him.

McCan joins them and steals food. Labiskwee tries to kill McCan. They are nearly strangled by the white death and are fired upon by pursuing Indians.

McCan dies. Labiskwee starves herself to death to save Smoke, who finally gets back to civilization, appreciating Labiskwee's great sacrifice and more in love with Joy Gastell than ever.

"God is good," she whispered. "He sent me a lover."

Yet Smoke was brave enough not to suggest his going alone. And ere he spoke he saw all his memory of the bright world reel and fade.

"We will go back, Labiskwee," he said. "You will be my wife, and we shall live always with the Caribou people."

"No, no!" And her body, in the circle of his arm, resented his proposal. "I know. I have thought much. The hunger for the world would come upon you, and in the long nights it would devour your heart. Four eyes died of hunger for the world; so would you die. And I will not have you die. We will go on across the snow mountains on the south traverse."

"Dear, listen," he urged. "We must go back."

She pressed her mitten against his lips to prevent further speech. "You love me. Say that you love me."

"I do love you, Labiskwee. You are my wonderful sweetheart."

Again the mitten was a caressing obstacle to utterance. "We shall go on to the cache," she said with decision. "It would be a great wrong to you to go back. I—I am only a wild girl, and I am afraid of the world, but I am more afraid for you. You see, it is as you told me. I love you more than anybody else in the world. I love you more than myself. The Indian language is not a good language. The English language is not a good language. The thoughts in my heart for you, as bright and as many as the stars—there is no language for them. How can I tell you them? They are there—see!"

As she spoke she slipped the mitten from his hand and thrust the hand in side the warmth of her parka until it rested against her breast. Tightly and steadily she pressed his hand in its position. And in the long silence he felt the beat, beat of her heart and knew that every beat of it was love. And then slowly, almost imperceptibly still holding his hand, her body began to incline away from him and toward the direction of the cache. Nor would he resist. It was as if he were drawn by her heart itself that so nearly lay in the hollow of his hand.

So firm was the crust that they slid along rapidly on their skis.

"Just here, in the trees, is the cache," Labiskwee told Smoke.

The next moment she caught his arm with a startle of surprise. The flames of a small fire were dancing merrily and crouched by the fire was McCan.

"I was minded you'd run without me," McCan explained when they came up, his small peering eyes glimmering with cunning. "So I kept an eye on the girl, an' when I seen her cabin skis an' grub I was on. I've brought my own skis an' webs an' grub. Will we be startin' now?"

Labiskwee looked swift consternation at Smoke, as swiftly achieved a judgment on the matter and spoke.

"McCan, you are a dog!" she hissed and her eyes were savage with anger. "I know it is in your heart to raise the camp if we don't take you. Very well

We must take you. But you know my father. I am like my father. You will do your share of the work. You will obey. And if you play one dirty trick it would be better for you if you had never run."

Daylight found them in the belt of foothills that lay between the rolling country and the mountains. McCan suggested breakfast, but they held on.

Labiskwee explained to Smoke her knowledge of the country and the way she planned to battle pursuit. There were but two ways out, one west, the other south. Smoke would immediately dispatch parties of young men to guard the two trails. But there was another way south. True, it did no more than penetrate halfway into the high mountains; then, twisting to the west and crossing three divides, it joined the regular trail. When the young men found no traces on the regular trail they would turn back in the belief that the escape had been made by the west traverse, never dreaming that the run always had ventured the harder and longer way around.

Glancing back at McCan, in the rear, Labiskwee spoke in an undertone to Smoke. "He is eating," she said. "It is not good."

Smoke looked. The man was secretly munching caribou suet from the pocketful he carried.

"No eating between meals," he commanded. "There's no game in the country ahead, and the grub will have to be whacked in equal rations from the start. The only way you can travel with us is by playing fair."

By 1 o'clock the crust had thawed so that the skis broke through, and before 2 o'clock the web shoes were breaking through. Camp was made and the first meal eaten. Smoke took stock of the food. McCan's supply was a disappointment. So many silver fox skins had he stuffed into the bottom of the meat bag that there was little space left for meat.

Enough food for a month, with careful husbanding and appetites that never hunted their edge, was Smoke's and Labiskwee's judgment. Smoke apportioned the weight and bulk of the packs, yielding in the end to Labiskwee's insistence that she, too, should carry a pack.

Next day the stream shrouded out in a wide mountain valley, and they were already breaking through the crust on the day when they gained the harder surface of the slope of the divide.

"Ten minutes later, and we wouldn't have got across the flats," Smoke said when they paused for breath on the bald crest of the summit. "We must be a thousand feet higher here."

But Labiskwee, without speaking, pointed down to an open flat among the trees. In the midst of it scattered about, were five dark specks that scarcely moved.

"The young men," said Labiskwee. "They are wallowing to their hips," Smoke said. "They will never gain the hard footing this day. We have hours the start of them. Come on, McCan. Back up. We don't eat till we can't travel."

In the higher valley in which they now found themselves the crust did not break till 3 in the afternoon, at which time they managed to gain the shadow of a mountain where the crust was already freezing again.

Black darkness came on, after a long twilight, at 9 o'clock, when they made camp in a clump of dwarf spruce. McCan was helpless. The day's march had been exhausting, but in addition, despite his nine years' experience in the arctic, he had been eating snow and was in agony with his parched and burning mouth. He crouched by the fire and groaned while they made the camp.

In the night came wind and snow, and through the day of blizzard they fought their way blindly, missing the turn of the way that led up a small stream and crossed a divide to the west. For two more days they wandered, crossing other and wrong divides, and in those two days they dropped spirit behind and climbed up into the shade of winter.

"The young men have lost our trail an' what's to stop us restin' a day?" McCan begged.

But no rest was accorded. Smoke and Labiskwee knew their danger. They were lost in the high mountains, and they had seen no game nor signs of game. Day after day they struggled on through an iron configuration of landscape that compelled them to labyrinthine canyons and valleys that led rarely to the west. The terrible toil and the cold ate up energy, yet they cut down the size of the ration they permitted themselves.

(Continued next week)

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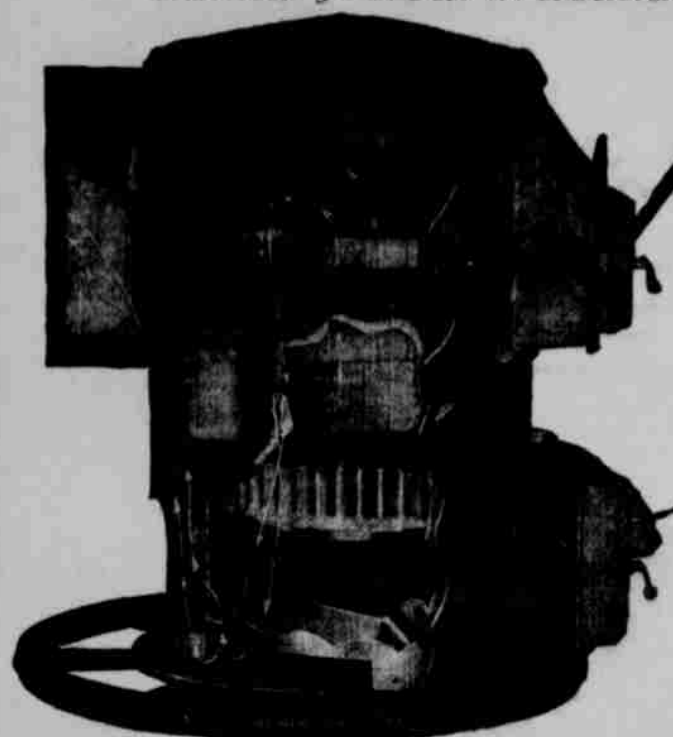
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